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## From Margins to Brick Kilns:

### *Women's Labour and the Nexus of Migration and Poverty*

Karabi Konch\* and Kashmiri Saikia\*\*

**Abstract—** This paper explores how poverty and related issues have driven women to migrate for employment in brick-kiln industries, reflecting their personal narratives. A significant number of women working in brick kilns have migrated from distant places. Poverty remains a major factor in their migration, compelling many women to leave their homes in search of better livelihood opportunities. As brick-kilns fall under the unorganised sector, they can accommodate a large workforce by offering consistent employment opportunities. As a result, brick-kiln becomes a viable survival option for poor, marginalized women who lack formal educational qualifications. Beyond poverty, some women migrate to brick-kiln industries in

pursuit of financial independence and escape from oppressive household environments. This paper draws data from both primary and secondary sources.

**Keywords-** Women Workers, Migration, Poverty, Labour, Brick-Kiln, Independent

#### I. BACKGROUND

Migration is often perceived primarily as a male-dominated phenomenon, with women either being left behind or accompanying their male family members as dependents (Thapan, 2006). However, migration data suggests that the number of female migrants is nearly equal to that of male migrants. In the year 2000, there were 84 million female migrants as compared to the 90 million male migrants (Jolly et al., 2003). There has been a continuous increase in the percentage of female migrants across the globe, and India is no exception to this trend. According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (2020-21), the female migration rate was 47.9%, which was 37.2% higher than the male migration rate. Bhattacharya (1998) argues that migration can be examined at three levels of spatial aggregation: a) movement away from birthplace (or place of previous residence) but within the

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same district. b) Movement from one district to another district within the same state, and c) movement from one state to another. Priyadarshani (2016) mentioned that Migration has been a historical phenomenon that involves movement between two cultures- that is, migrants' culture of origin and their culture at the destination- and this assimilation leads to the enrichment of culture, diversity, and emergence of vibrant cross-cultural landscapes. According to the International Organisation for Migration (2018), "Migration is the movement of a person or group of persons from their place of usual residence, either across an international border or within a state. Migration can also be categorised as temporary or permanent based on the duration of stay at the destination. The stages of the migration process include departure, in some cases transit through one or more states, immigration into the state of destination, and return. According to article 2 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Migrant workers, a migrant worker is defined as – "a person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a state of which he or she is not a national" (IOM,2018).

Poverty, driven by the need for employment opportunities, has been the primary motivation for migration, enabling people to fulfil their basic needs. Women migrate either independently or with their families, often for marriage,

employment or educational purposes. Thapan (2006) notes that women may migrate due to poor economic condition in search of work, or to oppressive marriages and traditional patriarchal norms. Most of the women who migrate in the low-skill category are domestic or care workers, in manufacturing, and to a lesser extent in agriculture (Sharma, 2011). Some are also employed in the entertainment industry (ibid). Migration can be a positive experience, for individuals and families, offering access to new opportunities, resources, and social networks. However, it can also be traumatic- particularly when individuals and families are forced to leave their homes due to conflict, environmental disasters, or other crises. structural factors, such as the demand for female labour in the industrial and agricultural sectors, also drive an increase in women's migration. Due to their subordinate position in society, migrant women often face limited access to resources, are more vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse, have low wages, and other forms of discrimination. Migration is often motivated by the hope of better employment and economic gains, or escape from societal constraints to gain autonomy for themselves and their dependents (Thapan,M, 2006). Deshingkar, Kumar et al. (2006) argues that economic conditions in a state can encourage migration. While educated migrants and industrial workers may benefit, poorer

migrants often face financial and social risks, including poverty, exploitation, and hazardous work. Migration can shape women's socio-economic opportunities, often offering them a chance to break away from restrictive environments. However, whether it enables complete freedom from patriarchy and traditional gender norms remains debatable. Farris (2010) notes that although women's participation in internal migration has increased, they remain confined to traditional, gendered roles within 'migratory chain'. Similarly, Banerjee and Raju (2009) observe and argue that migration often reduces women's workforce participation due to marriage and reproductive responsibilities, reinforcing gender norms. However, these studies focus broadly on gender and migration, but do not clearly discuss the specific experiences of women in low-skilled informal sectors. This study fills that gap by examining the lived experiences of brick-kiln women workers, whose poverty driven migration does not lead liberate them from patriarchy but exposes them to exploitative labour conditions.

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

The present study is qualitative in nature, based on fieldwork conducted between February 2021 and March 2022 in brick-kiln industries of the Sivasagar District in Assam. The study focuses on migrant women workers employed in the brick-kiln industries. The migrant

laborers are generally from different districts of Assam, such as Mangoldoi, Dhuburi, Nagaon, Morigaon, Barpeta, etc. For data collection, methods such as observation, focus group discussion, and in-depth interview methods were adopted. In-depth interviews, each lasting at least one hour, were used to gather primary data on women workers' every day livelihood, work, marriage, and migration. We also used recording as a method of data collection. However, not all interviews were recorded. We asked for consent before recording, but several women were uncomfortable while recording was on, and we then switched it off. The study employs a feminist methodology, which is rooted in feminist theory prioritising the voices and experiences of marginalised groups, especially women. It critiques the notion of objective, value-neutral knowledge, and emphasises the importance of situated knowledge in research. Sandra Harding and Dorothy Smith are prominent figures in feminist methodology, known for their contributions to standpoint theory and institutional ethnography, respectively. Sandra Harding's standpoint theory highlights that knowledge produced from the perspective of marginalised groups offers a more complete understanding of social reality. On the other hand, Dorothy Smith's institutional ethnography explores how ruling institutions shape everyday experiences, advocating for



knowledge grounded in women's lived realities. These approaches align with our research, which foregrounds the voices of brick-kiln women workers and highlights their struggles within patriarchal and exploitative labour structures. Our study is based on in-depth interactions with 25 women workers in the brick-kiln industry, focusing on their life stories, migration experiences, subordination, and negotiations with power structures. While sample size may seem small, this approach aligns with feminist epistemology, which emphasises voice, agency and subjectivity in understanding marginalized women's realities. Purposive sampling method was used for the selection of respondents, and their ages ranged from 20 to 50. Interviews were conducted in Bengali and Assamese, although talking in Bengali was a bit difficult for us. We took help from local workers in some interviews to understand their language. However, we have also used some of their local words to give the narratives a local vibe. The larger purpose of this paper is to examine whether poverty is the main reason for the migration of brick-kiln women workers. For this, we need to examine the circumstances that compel them to migrate. Moreover, we also need to understand whether their migration is forced or their individual decision, and why they migrate to work in brick-kilns. The data collected through narratives and unstructured in-depth interviews were analysed to

understand how women describe their lived experiences, focusing on their struggles with migration, poverty and labour. In order to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms have been used in place of their real names throughout this study. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns across their narratives, and to reveal key themes such as poverty and migration, labour, workplace exploitation, their life before and after migration, etc. This approach ensured that women's voices remained central while also uncovering broader structural inequalities in the brick-kiln industry. Having outlined the research methods, including data collection and analysis, it is important to contextualize the study by addressing the core issues faced by women in the brick-kiln industry. These women, largely from marginalised backgrounds, endure harsh working conditions, low wages, and socio-economic vulnerabilities exacerbated by migration. Their labour remains undervalued and invisible, further reinforcing patriarchal structures. Therefore, acknowledging these challenges highlights the need for this study, which aims to document the intersection of gender, labour, poverty and migration within the brick-kiln industry.

### **III. MIGRATION OF BRICK-KILN WOMEN WORKERS**

Migration is a movement of people from one place to another. Migration can be both seasonal and permanent; at the same time, people migrate from rich and poor families, but their migration experiences differ. The unskilled and vulnerable migrants from rural areas remain poor because of a lack of decent jobs for them (Sengupta, 2013). This kind of rural-urban migration has raised urban poverty without reducing rural poverty (Bremman, 1996). The process of migration has increased over the last few decades. While there has been an increase in long-distance permanent migration, the rate of increase in short-distance temporary and circular migration has also been remarkable (Sengupta, 2013). Internal migration has also increased significantly.

Internal migration is the movement of people from one area to another within the geographical boundary of a particular country. One of the major destinations for internal migration in India is brick-kilns, which start production operations every October and continue up to the pre-monsoon season the next year (Majumder, 2015). Brick manufacturing has remained a labour-intensive, traditional, and informal industry in India. The female labourers who work in brick kilns are drawn from rural and economically backward areas. In the context of women in the informal sector, Goel et al. (2011) reveal that “women find jobs in the informal sector because it is

easy to enter this field. In the context of construction workers, they found that the construction workers are generally migrants and they depend upon the contractors for their livelihood. There is no security in their job. They are even subjected to mistreatment and harassment at the hands of the contractors. There were indirect signs of sexual harassment in terms of language and gestures”. They concluded that there is discrimination in wages, types of work and availability of work, based on gender. Bargaining power is mostly with the employers, so exploitation is naturally the destiny of these poor workers (Goel et al., 2011). Nadal and Kumar (2016) argue that most of the brick-kiln women are illiterate, and 99% of women have no insurance policy and have no knowledge about any labour legislation or laws. Das and Devi (2018) mentioned that -the brick industry gives more opportunities to unemployed women and also helps them raise their income. However, in the name of earning, they neglect their health conditions. After being confined to the brick-making work, the unskilled migrant brick-kiln labourers get advanced payment from the local 'sardar', and the kiln owners ensure the job placement for the migrant workers at least for six months. The migrant women workers consider brick-kiln work and living arrangements inside the brick industry preferable to unemployment. The labourers get

tied to a particular kiln for a production season and then get circular inter-kiln, including the possibility of coming back to the first kiln again (Majumder, 2015). However, our study reveals that some migrant women workers get tied to a particular brick industry for a year or more than a year as they are indebted to the owner. They take loans from the owner, and till they do not return the loan to the owner, they have to work in the same industry.

#### **IV. SIVASAGAR DISTRICT AS A PLACE FOR MIGRATION OF BRICK-KILN WORKERS**

Sivasagar District is one of the districts of the state of Assam. The district has a total area of 2,668 sq. km; of which 42.93 sq. km is urban and 2625.07 sq. km is rural. The population of this district in 2022 was estimated at 1,263,560 (as per [adhar.uidai.gov.in](https://adhar.uidai.gov.in) December 2020 data). According to the 2011 census of India, Sivasagar district has a population of 1,151,050, out of which 589,216 were male and 561,834 were female. The majority of the population depends on agriculture. Almost 70,255 cultivators depend on agricultural farming, out of which 59,184 were men and 11,071 were women. A total of 14,008 people work on agricultural land as labourers, out of which 9,654 are men and 4,354 are women. ONGC, a major public sector enterprise, contributes to Sivasagar's economy through large-scale industrial activities, providing formal employment

with better wages and job security. On the other hand, informal sectors such as the brick-kiln industry, contribute by offering seasonal livelihood opportunities, though often with low wages and without a formal contract or social security. Moreover, the district's tea industry further strengthens its economic base. The district also provides space for poor, unskilled migrant women labourers at the bottom of the work hierarchy. The informal labour market of this district is crowded with many poor, unskilled seasonal migrant women workers from different parts of Assam. These poor migrant women workers mostly come to work in the informal sector of this district, such as brick kilns. The brick industries of this district employ 3 to 4 thousand labourers in one season. There are almost 40 brick industries in Sivasagar district, and 30 brick industries were found in operation. Women labourers from poor areas of Nagaon, Dhuburi, Mongoldoi district, and other parts of Assam migrate to work in brick-kilns in Sivasagar. However, they are not solely confined to Sivasagar district; their migration is temporary and seasonal in nature.

#### **V. POVERTY AND BRICK-KILN MIGRATION**

Women are often particularly affected by poverty and migration to brick kilns. In many cases, women may be forced to migrate along with their husbands and

families, leaving behind their homes and communities. Once they arrive at the brick kilns, they may be subjected to exploitative working conditions and low wages, which can make it difficult to support their families. Women who migrate to brick kilns may also face additional challenges related to gender. There are a number of key factors that contribute to the decision to migrate. These may include economic factors such as unemployment, low wages, or limited job opportunities in rural or remote areas. In some cases, individuals and families may also face environmental or climate-related pressures, such as droughts or natural disasters, which make it difficult to sustain livelihoods in their home communities. In addition, social and political factors, such as discrimination, violence, or instability, may also drive migration. Generally, married women workers were found to be encouraged to migrate with their husbands and in-laws. For most married migrant women workers, their migration was a joint decision with their husbands. Unmarried or separated women workers said that individual circumstances (like family pressure, poor economic status, marital status breaking down, and separation) forced them to migrate to the Sivasagar district

for work in the brick-kiln industry. All of them mentioned that they had received information about work-related migration from the 'sardar' and neighbours. The most frequently mentioned reason for the migration of brick-kiln women workers was poverty. This is illustrated by the narratives of two women workers, Sujata and Mira. Sujata and Mira are the primary earners in their family, and the financial condition of their families is very poor. They left their hometown and migrated to the Sivasagar district in order to help their families financially. In this context some women respondents describe their migration process.

### **Sujata (23 years old)**

Sujata was quite open about sharing her personal experiences. She works as a 'nikash' in the brick-kiln industry and had been there for one year when we interviewed her. She found this 'nikashi' work in the brick-kiln industry through a local 'sardar'. This is her second job; earlier, she worked as a house cleaner. She lives with her mother and her disabled brother. Her father works as a daily wage labourer. As her brother is disabled and her mother is ill, she had to look after her family. Moreover, poverty had further worsened Sujata's family situation. She narrated-

My father earned 200 rupees per day for work as a labourer in a stone queer. 200 rupees is not enough in today's time. Sometimes, rice and pluses are bought with this money, but vegetables do not come. My brother is not a normal person like us; he can neither walk nor eat anything by himself. My mother was carrying all the familial tension on her forehead, and now she has fallen ill. We do not even have enough money for the treatment of her illness. I could not get any work other than a housecleaner job, and I used to earn 100 rupees per day from that job. Even though we did not have our own land to do farming. I was looking for some other small work, meanwhile, I got an opportunity in the brick industry through our local sardar. Without any delay, I immediately said 'yes' to the 'sardar', because I needed money to save my family from death. I gave the money to my mother that I had received from the 'sardar' in advance. I feel sad for being far away from my family, but I also feel proud as I am doing something for my family.

### **Mira (38 years old)**

Mira is a 38-year-old widow and works as a 'Pathera' in the brick-kiln industry. Mira grew up in a poor Muslim family in the Nagaon district. Due to the poor

economic condition of her family, she got married at the age of 16 to a middle-aged man who was 18 years older than her. She narrated-

It's been 5 years since my husband left this world. After his death, I came back to my mother's house because my in-laws did not want to keep me in that house after my husband's death. In a poor Muslim society like ours, it often happens that after the death of the husband, the wife is not allowed to live in her in-law's house. Our society considers widows like us as burdens. I had heard many bitter words in my in-law's house after my husband's death. My in-laws treated me like a maid at my own 'sasurbrai' (in-laws' house). My mother-in-law had quarrelled with me in all matters; she blamed me for her son's death. My husband used to drink alcohol regularly, due to which his body became weak. He used to drink alcohol instead of lunch and dinner. In my mother's house, I had to face a lot of difficulties. The economic condition of my mother's house was poor from the beginning. So, it was not possible for my mother to bring up so many people at the same time with poor economic conditions. That is why I took the decision to migrate to Sivasagar for brick-making work. So far, everything is going well in this industry.

‘Malik’ has given us a room to live, which is enough for the poor like us.

The narrative of these two women workers portrays the circumstances that shaped the process of their migration and their desire as well as their thoughts. The family background and their motive for migration are the same, as they are from poor economic strata, and at the same time, they are intersected by their gender identity and class position. Because of their gender and class position, they are subordinated by their owners as well as their husbands.

### **The Desire to Being ‘Independent’**

We use the word ‘independent’ as defined by brick-kiln women workers whom we interviewed. The women workers who gave this reason for migration for wage earning used very particular terms to express that they wanted to make a change in their lives and stand on their feet. However, single women workers were more likely to give such a reason in comparison to married women workers. They were not only motivated by the opportunity to escape from poverty, but they also wanted to make a change in their lives and be self-sufficient. The motivation of women workers for migration from rural daughters and mothers into

industrial wage work is that they only left their villages when there were no jobs available in the village for them and when they were fighting poverty.

It is also important to note that none of the women workers who migrated to brick-kilns or their husbands interviewed expressed their desire to migrate in terms of being ‘self-independent’. Instead, they talked of migration as a means for earning a living to support their husbands and their family. In this context, we would like to argue that wage earning in order to support a family is a totally gendered concept, and at the same time, the notion of what it means to be ‘self-sufficient’ is also gendered. We have chosen the narratives of Romila and Nagma. For these two women, migration to the brick-kiln industry was primarily motivated by a desire to make a change in their lives, to escape from poverty and family pressure, and to be independent women. Moreover, we asked them who decided that they should migrate to the Sivasagar district for work in a brick kiln and why. We also asked them whether they preferred the village or living inside the brick kiln, given that they had experienced living in both. In this section, we have discussed brick-kiln women workers' desire for independence, focusing mainly on economic

autonomy. However, independence also includes emotional and social aspects. These women workers show emotional independence by resilience despite difficult circumstances, such as –enduring harsh working conditions, coping with family pressure. They gain social independence through bonds with other workers, and also create support networks that help them to overcome personal and societal challenges. By including these dimensions, our research highlights that their independence is not just about wages, but also about finding strength and solidarity in their everyday lives.

### **Romila (28 years old)**

Romila works as a ‘nikashi’ in the brick-kiln industry, and she was 28 years old at the time of the interview. She narrated-

My parents have six children, and I am the second eldest among six. My parents got me married at an early age because it was difficult for them to raise all the children together. Now I am the mother of two daughters. I was unhappy when I was first married. My husband did not show any love to me; he used to be bad to me and beat me, too. He drinks alcohol every day. When he comes home after drinking alcohol, he scolds me without any reason. In fact, he never allowed

me to do it on my own. Our relationship lasted for 7 years. I somehow wanted to maintain our marriage relationship. I thought his behaviour would change after having children, but what I thought did not happen. He started drinking too much. I felt helpless, and my mind was empty at that moment. For some years, I tolerated all his torture. Later, I also started speaking against him. That time, I did not think about what people I decided to leave him. I told my parents about it, and I decided to leave him. Although I came to my mother’s house with my two kids, the sorrow of my life did not go away even then. I needed money to raise my kids. Even my family has been suffering from poverty for a long time. I did not want to give them more trouble. I started looking for work. I could not find any good work, but I worked as a cleaner for a few months. Although I want a good job, it is hard for me to get a better job. ‘Ami Asiksitae, amar kono yogyata nei’ (I am uneducated and I have no qualification).

One day, one of my neighbours introduced me to the brick-kiln ‘sardar’. I made a deal with the ‘sardar’ and came with my two daughters to work here. I did not know whether I did good or badly by leaving my husband. Now I have no regrets about this. I feel independent today; I am not like

what I was before. 8 years ago, I was like a slave to my husband, but now I am standing on my feet and fully fulfilling the needs of my children. For poor people like us, if we get a house to satisfy our hunger, then that is enough. I have spent a year working in this industry, and I wish to spend more years in the future. I do not want to see the future of both my daughters like me. I want to send both my daughters to school so that they do not have the hardship that I had when they grew up.

**Nagma (32 years old)**

Nagma was 32 years old at the time of the interview. She works as 'nikashi' in the brick-kiln industry, and she narrated:

At 17, I fell in love with a boy from our nearby village and got married soon. But even after marriage, there was no change in my life. My in-laws did not give much importance to me because I am from a poor family background. They used to make fun of me for all my things. Whatever work I do, even if I keep working throughout the day, they are not satisfied with my work. They tortured me in the name of 'yautuk' (dowry). They used to beat me by asking for the land and property of my mother's house. Our marital life lasted for two years. To say it was our love marriage, but my husband was more supportive of his 'amma

(mother) and 'abba' (father). I felt very lonely in my in-laws' house. I could not bear the torture of them anytime, so one day I left my in-law's house and came back to my mother's house. I still do not want to go back to my in-laws' home, which was very harassing for me. I have seen many single women who have left their homes to work, make money, buy essential things for themselves, and make a change in their lives. I did not feel bad even after breaking my marital life. After coming back from 'sasural' (in-laws' house), I used to think day and night about how I earn money and how I run the house with empty hands. One day my destiny opened. I contacted a 'sardar' who promised me to find work at a brick kiln. Now I work as a 'nikashi' in the brick-kiln industry. This work is too difficult, but I have brought change in my life by working here.

It is observed from their narratives that their gendered identity makes them subordinate and abuse their wives. Their notion of being an independent woman is not only one who stands on her feet but also a woman who fights for their life to get a safe place. They have transformed themselves and challenged patriarchal hegemony. By accepting the vulnerability, subordination, and circumstances



in their life, the woman worker Romila is hoping that their daughters' lives will not be the same as hers.

### **Village Life or Brick-kiln:**

Most women workers preferred to live inside brick-kilns instead of returning to their poverty-stricken villages. Single women workers and single mothers fully agreed on this point. On the other hand, the married women workers felt that they should follow their husbands' decision and come with their husbands in order to help them in the brick-making process. Only a few women workers interviewed preferred village life, and their cleaner job was better in comparison to brick-kiln work. Geeti, one of the migrant women workers, felt that it was good to do a low-paid job in their hometown, while another woman worker, Menati, said that the village life was better for raising kids, as they would never face a hazardous and unhealthy environment like a brick-kiln. They prefer to live in brick kilns because brick-kilns are the only income-generation source through which they live. Moreover, another woman worker, Fatima, whom we interviewed, narrated, "Brick-kiln is our only support to stay alive. Before working in a brick kiln, we had to face many difficulties.

By working here, my family and I have gotten some relief. Even though this work is hard, now this work is our only hope to stay alive."

Migrant brick-kiln women workers faced a lot of problems after returning to their village. The greatest problems faced by the many migrant women workers after returning to their village were short of money, as they were already suffering from a debt crisis. The money they earned by working in the brick-making industry and taking away to their home ultimately went to clear their debts. Most of the women workers reported this is a crucial problem they faced instantly after returning to their homeland. Moreover, few married migrant women workers reported that their husbands spend the hard-earned money in the name of drinking alcohol and gambling.

### **Brick-kiln Women's Workers Everyday Experiences**

Women's work in the brick kiln sector depicts a prevalent system of exploitation where social invisibility, gender subordination, and economic need intersect. Because they do repetitive and physically hard work like moulding, drying, and brick transportation, women are essential to the production process. They are underpaid and

undervalued since their labour is frequently written off as unskilled despite their significant contributions. Their labour has taken a heavy physical effect. Also, to work long hours, women have to deal with physically demanding tasks, extreme heat, and dust exposure. Long walks, shifting large items, and bending for extended periods of time can all lead to long-term health concerns like exhaustion, respiratory disorders, and joint pain. In this context, one woman worker, Naina, explained, “My back feels like it is cracking as the time I finish work. I can hardly raise my arms to prepare meals for my family.”

Lack of access to healthcare exacerbates this physical strain because women frequently put their family’s needs ahead of their own. The ongoing salary gap is an indicator of their marginalisation. In brick kilns, women are paid much less than men, even when they do just as much work or more. Despite working the same long hours under harsh conditions, many women earn only a fraction of what men make, creating a cycle of economic dependence. The women workers we interviewed expressed frustration at this disparity but felt powerless to challenge it, as they feared losing their job. Patriarchal standards that minimise the contributions of

women are frequently used to justify this inequity. “I get paid less even when I make more bricks than my husband,” one woman worker”, Minati, narrated. Another woman, Sarada, said- “We get 900 rupees after making 1000 raw bricks. It is not that easy for women like me to make 1000 bricks in a day. We cannot make more than 600 bricks in a day. That’s why we never get the full Rs 900. We only get 500 rupees after making 600 bricks. At work, I have to be very innocent when dealing with ‘muhari’ for any matter, because my payment depends on it”. Benu said that- “I carry raw bricks on my head all day under the hot sun. My whole-body hurts, but I keep working. Because I need money. At the end of the day, I get 150 rupees, and my husband earns 200 rupees for the same hour. We work the same hours, but our wages are never the same”. These behaviours reinforce established gender hierarchies by limiting women’s financial freedom and maintaining their reliance on male family members’. Their narratives reflect the harsh reality for many women in the brick-kiln industry. Their labour is essential but undervalued, keeping them in a cycle of inequality and economic dependence.

Gender inequality is strengthened by the division of

labour in brick kilns. Usually, women are restricted to hard but unskilled labour, whereas men are given tasks that are deemed competent, such as managing production or running machines. Women are kept at the bottom of the labour hierarchy by this division, which limits their ability to advance their careers and acquire new skills. A supplementary layer of exploitation is introduced by the combined weight of labour and household duties. Furthermore, to work in kilns, most women are required to handle household duties, which leave little time for personal care or leisure. One of the interviewees, Rima, said, "I still have to cook, clean, and take care of my kids after working all day making bricks." Their difficulties are exacerbated by the fact that this unpaid household work is not recognised. Because brick kiln work is informal, women are not eligible for social benefits or labour rights. They are susceptible to poverty at times of illness or unemployment since they do not have access to maternity leave, childcare facilities, healthcare, or pensions. Access to local support networks and services is hampered by their nomadic lifestyle, which presents additional difficulties for migrant women. "No one assists us when we go from one kiln to another. We are invisible", Rebati said.

The overlapping identities of caste and class further impact the lives of women working in the brick kiln sector. Due to the intersectional nature of exploitation in this industry, women from marginalized groups like Dalits and Adivasis frequently hold the lowest-paying and riskiest occupations. In addition to limiting their chances, this compounded prejudice exposes them to further levels of social marginalisation and stigma. Renuka explained, "They give me the dirtiest jobs and treat me like I am less than human because of my caste."

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

Brick-kiln women workers migrate for different reasons and under different circumstances. Their gender and poverty make them particularly vulnerable. Although migration is an important part of the lives of women in brick-kilns, the result of migration is not beneficial for them. Nitya Rao (2006) argues that "migration is neither a result of individual choice nor is it merely a response to deforestation and insufficient agricultural production, just as other relations of production, migration decisions, experiences, and outcomes too are mediated by ideologies of ethnicity and gender of power, status, and relative valuations of work in society."

However, in the context of migration, poverty, and labour in brick-kiln, our study highlights the complicated reality faced by women who work in brick-kilns, going through difficult conditions, unstable economies and persistent gender inequality. They work in the kilns and at home, but their efforts are not acknowledged in official documents or public discourse due to the invisibility of their dual burden. Not only gender, but also intersecting caste, class, migrant identities contribute to their invisibility, further restricting their access to resources, opportunities, keeping them socially and economically marginalised. Women migrate to the brick kilns in search of a living, frequently motivated by economic desperation and the lack of local livelihoods. But economic advancement is rarely the result of this migration. The connection between poverty, labour, and migration draws attention to the systemic injustices that push women into and trap them within, brick kilns. Policies that address the socioeconomic circumstances that push women into such insecure jobs are necessary to address these interrelated challenges. Their lived experiences expose a cycle of exploitation and limited agency, highlighting the need for structural reforms and focused

governmental measures to enhance their living and working conditions. A multifaceted strategy that incorporates social programs, legal protection, and opportunities for skill development is needed to address these problems. To stop wage exploitation and hazardous working conditions, policy makers must guarantee the rigorous implementation of labour laws through routine inspections. The well-being of female workers and their families would be greatly enhanced by the introduction of mandatory healthcare services at kiln sites. Establishing literacy and skill-building initiatives is equally crucial since it allows women to escape cyclical labour reliance and access alternate source of income. Also, workers voices can be amplified, and a support system that tackles both family and workplace challenges can be established by enhancing partnerships between NGOs and local governments. Campaigns for community-based awareness can oppose detrimental social norms, encouraging respect for women's labour contributions and their labour rights. Sustainable change can be achieved by giving brick-kiln women workers lived experiences a central place in the policy-making process.

This study contributes to the field of 'Sociology of Gender'

and 'Industrial Sociology' by showing the lived experiences of brick-kiln women workers and how they deal with challenges in a male dominated structure. It also provides a base for future studies and promotes the inclusion of brick-kiln women workers in governmental welfare schemes.

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